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views Charles Régismanset's collection of epigrams entitled "Les Contradictions." The reviewer is especially struck by the warning :

"Ne dis pas :
 " — Je n'aime pas la danse.
 " Mais :
 " — Je danse mal."

He applies this bit of searching criticism to various phases of life, and quotes it repeatedly in the course of his review.

In the April number of the *Quarterly Review*, the hundredth anniversary of Tennyson's birth is commemorated by an appreciation of the English poet from the pen of the same French critic. In the course of a rapid summary of the chief facts of Tennyson's life, Faguet says :

"Après quelques changements de résidence il se fixe à Farringford, dans l'Île de Wight, s'y complait et y caresse son bonheur, ne s'écartant de ce lieu que rarement pour aller à Londres qu'il aime peu ou plutôt où il s'aime peu.

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"NEVER LESS ALONE THAN WHEN ALONE."

To the Editors of Mod. Lang. Notes.

SIRS :—In connection with the comment in *Modern Language Notes* for February and April by Professor Cook and Professor Allen on the source of the apothegm, "Never less alone than when alone," I venture to call attention to the opening sentences of Cowley's essay, "*Of Solitude*," which are as follows :—

"*Nunquam minus solus, quam cum solus*" is now become a very vulgar saying. Every man and almost every boy for these seventeen hundred years has had it in his mouth. But it was at first spoken by the excellent Scipio, who was without question a most worthy, most happy, and the greatest of all mankind. His meaning, etc."

Professor Allen's citation of Cicero's *De Officiis* (3. 1) apparently determined the source of the apothegm for English literature, but Cowley's testimony to its longstanding popularity seems worth quoting.

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LITERATURE OF MELANCHOLY.

To the Editors of Mod. Lang. Notes.

SIRS :—In his *Beginnings of the English Romantic Movement* (p. 91), Professor Phelps says regarding the "literature of melancholy" which flourished in the middle and latter half of the eighteenth century, "Of course its original inspiration from *Il Penseroso* is indisputable." Professor Beers, in his more extended work on the same subject, is guarded in his statements but seems to think Milton's poem was an important influence upon this so-called "graveyard poetry." Altho one or the other of these opinions has been accepted by most students of eighteenth century literature, both seem to me to be based upon a confusion of several quite different things and a misunderstanding of Milton's poem.

In the first place, the fondness of the eighteenth century for gloom found expression in a number of notable works which were entirely uninfluenced by *Il Penseroso*, for example, Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742-8), Blair's *Grave* (1745), and the less known *Night* (1728) of Ralph in poetry, and in prose James Harvey's *Meditations among the Tombs* (1745-6). There is also a remarkable expression of it as early as 1725 in a letter of the poet Thompson's, "Now I imagine you seized with a fine romantic kind of melancholy on the fading of the year ; now I figure you wandering, philosophical and pensive, amidst the brown, withered groves, while the leaves rustle under your feet, the sun gives a farewell, parting gleam . . . Then again when the heavens wear a more gloomy aspect, the winds whistle, and the waters spout." It seems pretty clear, accordingly, that *Il Penseroso* did not furnish the original inspiration for the "literature of melancholy." To what degree did it influence that literature?

About 1740 Milton's octosyllabics became very popular and furnished a model for hundreds of poems. It would be natural to suppose, if *Il Penseroso* were closely connected with the poetry of gloom, that a large number of these imitations would be of a melancholy character and that many of them would breathe the clammy air of the tomb. This is very far from being the case. My recollection of the four hundred and more poems

of this type that I have found is that there are very few gloomy pieces among them, far fewer, I am certain, than among the poems written at the time in other forms. *Il Penseroso* seems to have been scarcely more popular and no more imitated than its joyous companion piece. Poems on solitude, contemplation, and similar subjects connected with a love of retirement and seclusion are, to be sure, frequently found and were without doubt influenced by Milton's poem. But these themes are not gloomy any more than is *Il Penseroso*—which, it should be observed, is not *Il Melancholio*. They praise a quiet, contemplative life and they praise it, as Milton does, because it seems to them the happiest life and not because they are deprest or because they enjoy gloom. It is a far cry from the mood of *Il Penseroso* to that of the *Night Thoughts* or of such passages as the following from Warton's *Pleasures of Melancholy*:

But when the world
Is clad in Midnight's raven-colour'd robe,
Mid hollow charnal let me watch the flame
Of taper dim, shedding a livid glare
O'er the wan heaps; while airy voices talk
Along the glimm'ring wall; or ghastly shape
At distance seen, invites with beck'ning hand
My lonesome steps, thro' the far-winding vaults.

Professor Beers apparently uses the terms "elegiac mood," "love of retirement and seclusion," "low spirits," and "Pensive Meditation" interchangeably (*Eng. Romanticism XVIII Cent.*, p. 162), and accordingly, it would seem, groups all the poetry of the mid-eighteenth century which exhibits any of these under what he calls "the *Il Penseroso* school." Then, too, tho he says, "There were various degrees of somberness from the delicate gray of the Wartons to the funereal sable of Young's *Night Thoughts* and Blaire's *Grave*," Professor Beers fails to call attention to the important fact that the sombreness of one poet differs radically from that of another in kind. We have, for instance, the real tho far from intense melancholy of Gray, the exaggerated love of gloom of Thomas Warton and Walpole—which is genuine only as it comes from a healthy enjoyment of ghosts, mysteries and Gothic architecture,—and the fondness for a retired, studious life which is expressed in *Il Penseroso* and was exemplified by Milton's happy years at Horton. The love of gloom which characterized much of the literature

of the middle and later part of the eighteenth century belongs with the fondness for the Middle Ages, for ruins, and for wild nature. It was a part of the romantic and rather sentimental tendencies of the time; it is alien to the mood of *Il Penseroso* and would have been quite the same if Milton's poem had never been written.

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THE MEANING OF VITA NUOVA.

To the Editors of Mod. Lang. Notes.

SIRS:—The word *Nuova* in the title of Dante's famous opusculum is usually interpreted to mean either 'youthful,' or 'new' in the sense of regenerate through his love for Beatrice. Witte in the *Prolegomena* to his edition pretty effectually disposes of the former interpretation but accepts the latter. It has always seemed to me unsatisfactory to connect the idea of regeneration through love with a nine year old boy, even after making all possible allowances for the precocity of genius, and it has long seemed to me that the word might bear another meaning, which, so far as I am aware, has not been proposed. This meaning is that of 'strange,' or 'mystic.'¹ It must be remembered that Dante gives the title in Latin, and that *novus* has at times the sense of 'strange,' 'never before experienced,' while, so far as I know, it does not connote the idea of regeneration. In Italian, too, examples of *nuovo* = strange, are plentiful. The life which Dante describes is certainly a mystic one, in which by meditation and certain conduct he attains an esoteric knowledge of love. I think this is true whether we regard Beatrice as wholly human, wholly allegorical, or partly one and partly the other.

¹It is true that Witte pointed out the sense of *meraviglioso, straordinario*, which *nuovo* and *novello* sometimes have, especially in poetic language (*Anmerkungen zu den Gedichten der V. N.*, in *D. A.'s Lyrische Gedichte übers. u. erl. von Kannegiesser u. Witte, Leipz., 1852*), but he does not interpret this meaning as equivalent to 'mystic,' nor does he adopt it as explaining the title; also that Rossetti uses the word 'strange' as a translation of *nuovo* in the text, but he expressly adheres to the translation *New Life* (in the sense of regenerate life), calling this, however, the more 'mystical' interpretation (*Early Italian Poets*, Part II, Introduction).